

Tips on Storytelling

Children's Services, Public Library Services

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What is Storytelling?

Storytelling works much like driving a car – the story is made up of a basic three-act structure. The teller prepare the audience (turns the key and puts the car into gear), lets out the clutch, so the audience (car) picks up speed and with each gear change, they travel together along a story (road). The magic is in each individual's "journey" or connection with the teller and the story.

Similar to a journey in a car, each person's enjoyment is different. Some notice every detail along the way, while others, only focus on major aspects of the journey, such as the technical details of the drive. So it is with storytelling.

Storytelling Tips

Choosing Stories for Storytelling

- Your first step is to find a story. Not just any story. Find a story you love! You'll tell it often, and you want to enjoy it every time.
- Consider your audience. What are their preferences likely to be?

Preparing Your Stories

- Tell in your own words. If you try to memorise the words of the story, you set yourself up for failure and confusion. Just remember the few lines of plot, and feel free to let them come out differently.
- Pay special attention also to how you portray your characters. Good characters bring a story to life, so put life into them, with face, voice, gesture, and body posture. Try to make each of them different enough so they're easily told apart.
- Try your story, refine where necessary, or discard it if it does not meet your needs.
- Picture the story in your mind to help you better communicate it with the audience. Unless you can see the action clearly in your mind, you'll have difficulty communicating it in words to an audience.

Telling your Story

- Don't think you have to be perfect the first time you tell your story. It's not likely!
- If possible, tell your story first to friends in a small group. As you gain confidence, perform for larger groups. Before long, you'll think nothing of telling to a large room full of strangers.
- Check the space ahead of time, so you can spot problems and arrange any special needs.
- As you tell your story, take your time, and give listeners— time to "see" the story, time to laugh, time to feel, time to reflect, time to hang on the edge of their seats for what comes next. It's easy to go too fast, hard to go too slow. If you're losing their attention, you may need to slow down!
- Storytelling is interactive. As your listeners respond to your story, let your story respond to your listeners. Make your voice and gestures "bigger" or "smaller." Stretch or shrink parts of the story. Pay attention to what works and what doesn't, so next time you can change, add, or subtract.

Other Tips

Props, Costumes and storytelling Aids

- They are useful prop for beginners. If you are suffering from stage fright, a storytelling aid such as this could help combat your terror.
- Changing into a 'storytelling costume' helps the teller assume a new role and become more focused on the audience.
- With a puppets or other aid, such as a rain-stick to capture the audience's attention, the teller becomes less self-conscious and can become more relaxed.
- Remember to keep the height of your puppets constant. Puppets don't grow taller or shorter during a performance unless the story says so.

Body and Movement

- Posture - stand comfortably. Look out to your audience. Make eye contact. Don't look down on the ground.
- Rhythm and pacing - find the tempo of each character and each section of the story. In general, we have a tendency to speak too quickly. Slow down. Speak clearly. You may alter your voice and/or posture to indicate various characters in the story.
- Punctuate the story with gesture. Find the exact word or phrase where a gesture or movement would strengthen the delivery. Don't make unnecessary, distracting movements with the hands.

Stage fright?

- All performers feel stage fright, people aren't constantly judging you when they are enjoying a story, and if you have fun so will they, so stop assuming you have to pass any self-imposed, probably unreachable skill standard.
- If you get stuck, keep going. Don't frown, stop, or apologise. Nobody but you knows what you were going to say, so they will never spot your departures from it - there are no 'mistakes'.

Source: Helen McKay.,1996. About storytelling: a practical guide. Sydney: Hale & Iremonger.

<http://www.aaronshep.com/storytelling/Tips.html> (Last Accessed 13 July 2006)

<http://www.sacredvoices.com/docs/tips.htm> (Last Accessed 13 July 2006)

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ASK@nlb.gov.sg

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